

FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union www.fbu.org.uk

July 2009



WHO RUNS THE FIRE SERVICE ?

**No-one stays in the fire
minister's hot seat for long
(enough to get a grip...)**

See page 10

October 21

**Why I'm going
to the lobby**

Page 12



Pay

**Union consults
on offer of 1.25%**

Page 4



**Regional
Controls**

**Possible new delays
could see project miss
Olympic deadline**

Page 14



Pay: consider the offer and the issues



We have finally obtained a pay offer from our employers. At 1.25% it is certainly nothing that will see FBU members jumping for joy. The Executive

Council has concluded that this is the best offer obtainable by negotiation alone. In other words, to achieve more would take a campaign including industrial action. Members are asked to consider the offer and the surrounding issues at branch meetings so the Executive Council can consider members' views in order to provide a response to the employers. One key lesson from the past months

of negotiation is that the fire service employers have no clear policy on pay. The FBU remains committed to developing a formula which would avoid annual conflict on pay. Regrettably, the employers fail to appreciate that they should take account of the special circumstances applying in an emergency service. That is a recipe for conflict at some stage and over the next year we shall need to discuss in full how we address these changed circumstances.

Control regionalisation – more chaos

Articles in the press recently drew attention to the latest talk of a further delay in the FiReControl project to regionalise our

emergency fire controls in England. At a local level, managers had started to inform staff that a further major delay was on the way. CLG civil servants stated that this was not the case but that they could not rule out delays at some stage.

This is merely the latest stage in the farce that is FiReControl (I've never quite understood that logo either – but no doubt someone was well paid for it). Following the latest reshuffle of the cabinet we have again raised our concerns with ministers. Gordon Brown, beset by problems on all sides, has tried to give the impression that the government is now ready to listen to the concerns of the people. We hope that

Contents

Features

10 WHO RUNS THE FIRE SERVICE?

Fire ministers don't last long enough to get to grips with the job

12 WHY I'M GOING TO THE LOBBY AND RALLY

FBU members on why they will be in London on 21 October

14 LOSING THE OLYMPIC RACE?

Yet another delay for the regional controls project means it may not be ready for the key 2012 date

Regulars

4 NEWS

Union consults members on pay offer; Government plans for climate change; Coroner warns on fire safety

5 SOUNDING OFF

Black trade union history

7 NEWS FOCUS

FBU can play a key role in exposing the racism of the BNP

8 VIEW FROM THE AERIAL LADDER PLATFORM

Firefighter unions from 12 countries form alliance

16 WHAT'S MY ROLE?

Jenny Morris, HSE operational policy advisor for UK FRS

17 WORKING FOR YOU

Essex firefighters resist plan to cut one in ten frontline staff

18 HEALTH

Put your best foot forward for health

19 LEGAL BEAGLE

Theft at work; redundancy; compromise agreements

20 DAY OFF

Weymouth firefighter Diane Critchlow races traditional rowing boats

22 PUZZLE PAGE

Your chance to win tickets an Ashes cricket test match

23 STATION CAT

The news they don't want you to hear

24 25-YEAR BADGES



PA PHOTOS

5

Yet more floods in June added emphasis to the FBU's demand that the fire service have a statutory duty to deal with widespread flooding.

Win
Ashes
tickets
page 22



STEFANO CAGNONI

16

Jenny Morris, Operational policy advisor for UK FRS, Health and Safety Executive, talks to *Firefighter*

this approach, if it is in any way serious, will apply to those of us who work in the fire and rescue service. We hope they will listen to common sense and scrap the project completely. The alternative is more and more embarrassment for the government as the project goes wrong again and again – as it will.

October 21 rally and lobby

You will have seen the first bulletin for our rally and lobby in October. In this month's

magazine, you will also see comments from members who are due to attend. We are seeking to address crucial issues affecting our service: the attack on control members; the never ending cuts and attacks at local level; and the need for investment for the future. These issues affect every single one of us.

Over the next few months we shall be holding meetings in every area to discuss these matters and to ask people to attend the rally.

The attack on control members, the never ending cuts and attacks at local level and the need for investment for the future. These issues affect every single one of us

Please ensure you attend or are represented at your local meeting.

Lindsey Oil Refinery

In June I attended a rally for the Lindsey Oil Refinery workers who had been sacked for fighting against redundancies. The actions by the employers in this industry have been a disgrace as they have attempted to play workers against each other in a race to the bottom, undercutting agreed rates of pay and attempting to divide the workforce by endless systems of sub-contracting. The workers responded by a solid display of unity. Despite all the adverse press reports, those involved are simply hard working people trying to earn a living and protect their future. They deserve the support of all of us.

Matt Wrack

OBITUARY

Dave Buckney

The May/June 2001 issue of *Firefighter* carried an article about the stress, depression and suicide attempt of a former Merseyside brigade official. The article won acclaim from the TUC in its annual Press and PR awards for its openness and honesty in addressing the difficult issue of mental illness.

He urged people to recognise and understand the illness with which he was cursed and for the FBU to recognise the problems of stress - particularly those associated with the work of a union official. The article still strikes a chord and many of the issues raised still have to be addressed within the union and in the wider world.

Dave had spent more than ten years as a brigade official in Merseyside with all the stress and strain that came with it. He retired on ill health grounds a few years ago. He never fully recovered from the injuries he sustained from the truck with which he claimed to have had a "head butting contest".

In June, Dave finally succeeded in ending his life.

Dave was a passionate trade unionist and a great advocate for the fire service. He was a great friend and an awesome foe. He was full of humour and mischief and even in his retirement felt it difficult to let the job go.

Although in recent times he had become an increasingly troubled person, he remained a thorn in the side of the management he had fought against for so long.

He will be sadly missed by the firefighters and control staff in Merseyside and throughout the union where he had many friends.

Dave Buckney, former brigade chair, Merseyside, was born 11 August 1954. He died 14 June 2009, aged 54.

Ian Foulkes, former brigade chair, Merseyside



20

Pushing the boat out:
Meet Diane Critchlow
— Cornish gig rower

■ Published by the Fire Brigades Union,
Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road,
Kingston upon Thames KT2 7AE
www.fbu.org.uk
■ Design by Edition Periodicals,
241–251 Ferndale Road, London SW9 8BJ
www.editionperiodicals.co.uk
■ Printed by Southernprint Ltd,
17–21 Factory Road, Upton Industrial Estate,
Poole, Dorset BH16 5SN



News

July 2009

Latest news

Sounding off

In brief



Union begins to consult members on 1.25% offer

PAY

The Union is consulting with members over an offer from the national fire service employers for an annual pay rise of 1.25%. The rise would apply across the board and take effect from 1 July 2009.

Members will have 28 days to decide whether they find it acceptable or tell their representatives they wish to reject it and are urged to attend branch meetings to discuss it. Members' views will then be considered by the FBU's executive council (EC) ahead of a response to employers.

The consultation is in line with the decision of the FBU's annual conference in May. Conference, which called on the Union to negotiate the maintenance of members' living standards and to seek to make up any lost ground resulting from previous below-inflation pay rises, also called on the Union

to prepare for a trade dispute and ballot for possible strike action if the employers failed to make an acceptable pay offer.

The 1.25% offer, made on 19 June, came after seven months of negotiations. At the last meeting of the National Joint Council

The EC believes the offer is the best that can be achieved through negotiations alone

(NJC) on 3 June, the Union had expected a pay offer but received none.

The FBU told employers of its "anger and frustration" at this, noting "the very high pay rises given at local level to Chief Fire Officers and other principal managers." Following an adjournment, the FBU then registered a claim for a pay rise across all roles for 2009 of 2.5%. Employers say the

offer is "fair" and that it is "the absolute maximum level of affordability".

General Secretary Matt Wrack said the EC believed the offer was, in the current climate, "the best that can be achieved through negotiations alone. This is especially the case in view of the fact that the FBU negotiators, as endorsed by Annual Conference, refused to negotiate around further detrimental changes to conditions of service."

He urged members to attend branch meetings to discuss the offer.

This year's rise marks a break from the past. FBU members' pay increases have been calculated through a pay formula since 1978. This ceased to operate last year, although the rise was the same as if the pay formula had operated.

More info: www.fbu.org.uk



The consultation process is in line with the decision of the FBU's annual conference

Sounding off!

MARY DAVIS

London Metropolitan University

Black trade union history

We want to create a digital archive of the lives and experiences of black trade unionists throughout England and Wales from 1948 onwards. We know they have played an important and active role in the British trade union movement and in wider society, but very little of this history has been documented.

It's an aspect of Britain's labour history that is completely missing. The British Library's oral history archive has the voices of black workers, but there are no black trade unionists. There is a problem with people not taking trade unions seriously and not acknowledging the role black people played in those unions.

With this project – a partnership between the TUC and London Metropolitan University's Working Lives Research Institute – we want to interview people who were active at a local level as well as people at a regional



The strike by the mainly Asian workforce at the Grunwick photo-processing plant in the 1970s was a landmark for black trade unionism

and national level. We've looked at the main industries in which black workers were involved, and have divided the country into several areas. Our aim is to carry out interviews in each area, trying to capture the significant struggles.

Part of our challenge is to bring out things nobody knows. We have some idea of the history but, because this hasn't been done before, we're hoping to get a different perspective, one that is not sanitised.

We're also hoping the history of black self-organisation will come out: the policy of not hiring black people, excluding them from areas of work, sometimes with trade unions colluding, key disputes such as the Bristol bus strike, examples of good practice where black and white workers fought together.

We're hoping the FBU and its members will make a donation to help cover our costs because we believe our trade union heritage is preserved and that its image is not colour blind.

→ Donations can be sent to the TUC Mary Davis is Head of the Centre for Trade Union Studies and deputy Director of Working Lives Research Institute, London Metropolitan University



Fire and rescue services were again under pressure as heavy rain and storms swept across the south and east of the country in early June

Government moves to 'protect the public from immediate risk'

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is happening today, the Government said as it launched UK Climate Projections 2009, a tool to understand how the UK's climate will change. The Met Office has used the latest science to project changes in temperature, rainfall, sea level, humidity, cloud, and radiation.

Environment Secretary Hilary Benn said: "There is no doubt about it – climate change is already happening – the hottest ten years on record globally have all been since 1990."

The Government is tackling climate change under five "fronts", one of which is "protecting the public from immediate risk".

The announcement followed reports by the Environment Agency that found one in six homes in England are now at risk of flooding from rivers, the sea, or surface

water from overflowing drains with these risks continuing to grow.

Environment Agency chairman Lord Smith said: "There are important decisions for us all to take about how to manage these risks to protect people, communities, businesses and the economy in future."

The Union has called for an end to cuts and, instead, a substantial boost to investment in fire and rescue services to help them cope with the pressures caused by extreme weather events linked to climate change.

It has criticised the Government for refusing to implement the Pitt Review recommendation that the fire service be given a statutory duty to respond to widespread flooding. That refusal is leaving local fire crews struggling with significant flooding without proper equipment to enable them to work safely in water.



Fourteen retained firefighters from Tarbert (above) and Scalpay in the Scottish Highlands and Islands, have joined the Union, making both stations 100% FBU. This followed visits by FBU officials in May and June.

RDS EC member Tam Mitchell (right) with Scotland fire minister Fergus Ewing at a Scottish government conference on the retained duty system. Speakers included FBU Executive Council member Roddy Robertson, who addressed 60 staff from 130 Scottish RDS stations. Issues discussed included training, transfers between duty systems and availability systems. Brigade secretaries Jim Malone, Gordon McQuade and Gerry McLeod attended and the FBU stand proved popular.





PA PHOTOS

Firefighters at the Penhallow fire

Coroner warns tourism minister on fire safety

PENHALLOW HOTEL FIRE

The Coroner for the inquest into Cornwall's Penhallow Hotel fire is to write to the Minister of Tourism to highlight concerns raised at the inquest about the change in fire legislation and to self-regulation and the risk, in particular at hotels and guesthouses, of future deaths, if insufficient measures are provided to support investment in fire safety or to ensure compliance.

The inquest found no-one was to blame for Britain's worst hotel fire for 40 years.

Three people died in the blaze that took place just after midnight on August 18, 2007.

Families of the victims pointed to failings in the hotel's fire safety policy and said better facilities could have saved lives. John Hughes, brother of two of the victims, speaking on behalf of the families outside Truro Crown Court following the verdict said: "From the evidence, we were somewhat surprised to hear the hotel was not

compliant with the fire safety order of 2005, particularly regarding its requirements for smoke detectors in all bedrooms. We feel that the absence of these smoke detectors could have saved the lives of our loved ones. This was just one of several failings in the hotel's fire safety."

The inquest had been told the hotel, part of the Holdsworth Hotels group, did not have the required fire safety procedures in place. Guests giving evidence said the fire alarm could not be heard on the third floor where all of the people who died were staying. Witnesses also spoke of suitcases being left in the corridor overnight.

Mr Hughes said: "Many hotels and guesthouses in Cornwall and throughout the UK are quite possibly aware of the fire regulation changes but have not implemented them and are breaking the law."

Cornwall Coroner Dr Emma Carlyon said at the conclusion of the inquest that all hotel and guesthouse owners needed to be reminded of their responsibility to comply with fire safety measures.

Union calls for fresh investment

CORNWALL

The FBU is calling for a cash injection into Cornwall fire and rescue service to allow 24-hour fire cover to be reinstated in Newquay, amid concerns that the Newquay

crew is struggling to cope in the summer months and just days after the conclusion of the Penhallow Hotel fire inquest, where the level of fire cover was questioned by the coroner for Cornwall. Concerns were raised over the time taken by fire

crews to get to the hotel and the equipment they had available.

The population explosion in Newquay during the summer months puts a huge strain on resources, and 24-hour cover is vital for the town, said Cornwall FBU Chair Mike Tremellen.

In brief



◆ Reduced ignition propensity (RIP) cigarettes should make their European debut in Scotland, according to a motion tabled by MSP Stewart Maxwell in the Scottish parliament. It notes that 48.1% of fire deaths in Strathclyde and 44.8% of fire deaths across Scotland in 2007-08 were attributable to smoking materials.

◆ 2008 was another difficult and often dangerous year for trade unionists around the world, according to this year's ITUC Annual Survey of Trade Union Rights Violations, which details abuses of fundamental workers' rights in 143 countries. 76 trade unionists were killed due to their actions to defend workers' rights, and many more were attacked physically or subjected to harassment, intimidation or arrest by the authorities. The report makes for depressing – but necessary – reading. For more visit: <http://survey09.ituc-csi.org/>



JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

◆ General Secretary Matt Wrack (above) and 25 other FBU members and officials attended a 6am GMB/Unite picket at Total's Lindsey Oil Refinery (LOR) in Lincolnshire on Wednesday 24 June to demonstrate solidarity with the hundreds of engineering and construction workers who were fired the previous week after walking out in an unofficial strike against management attempts to tear up union agreements. Keith Gibson, on behalf of LOR Strike Committee, thanked the FBU members and officials for attending and for their financial support. "It meant so much to the LOR lads in their struggle against victimisation for their stance in protecting the NAECI agreement, which protects all construction workers pay, terms and conditions while employed in the UK."

FBU can have a key role

STOP THE BNP

The FBU can play a key role in exposing the racism of the BNP following the far right party's election to the European Parliament. Nick Lowles, editor of the anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight*, believes firefighters can take the Union's anti-racist message into their workplaces and their communities.

Speaking after the party won two seats in the European elections, Mr Lowles said: "The FBU did a lot of good work in the run-up to the elections, preventing a bigger BNP win, but there is still a lot to do."

"Our priority is to channel the anger of the many people who campaigned against the BNP. We need to go into the communities and speak to people, winning back hearts and minds, if you like. Unions can help by addressing their own members about racism and challenging the BNP myths."

The BNP set out believing it could win seven or eight European seats but, despite the Westminster expenses scandal, a massive collapse in the Labour vote and a general disenchantment with politics and politicians, it managed only two.

Scraping in

In the North West it picked up just 8% of the vote, with leader Nick Griffin scraping in by 1,200 votes while across the Pennines, former National Front member Andrew Brons was elected with 9.8%.

Steve Harmon, regional official for the North West (Region 5), took the fight against the BNP onto the streets of Lancashire.

He said: "The result was obviously disappointing, but I think we did as well as we could considering we were up against it."

"In the areas where we did serious campaigning – places such as Preston, where we delivered more than 70,000 leaflets – the BNP vote actually went down. We're hoping to build on our campaign and open the public's eye to the openly racist policies of the BNP."

Far right parties did well in other European countries too, picking up seats in the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Slovakia and Hungary.

In another reflection of the British vote,

Steve Harmon warns the FBU Annual Conference of the dangers of the BNP. Below, delegates prepare to leaflet against the far-right party



ELECTION RESULTS

EUROPE		UK (72)	SEATS
Left	34	Con	26
Socialists	183	UKIP	13
Green	50	Labour	13
Liberal	84	Lib Dem	11
EPP (cntr right)	264	Green Party	2
UEN (right)	28	BNP	2
Ind/Dem	21	SNP	2
No group	72	Plaid Cymru	1
		Sinn Fein	1
		Democratic Unionist Party	1



other right wing parties triumphed at the expense of the left, with the centre right European People's Party – the group from which David Cameron's Conservatives are withdrawing – maintaining power in Brussels.

FBU campaign

In the UK local elections, there was a similar shift to the right, with the Conservatives gaining seven councils, Labour losing four and the Liberal Democrats losing one. In Cornwall, the Lib Dems blamed the FBU campaign against countywide cuts for their defeat.

The BNP, which stood for election in 450 wards, gained just three councillors, in North West Leicestershire, Hertfordshire and Burnley. Steve Harmon said: "Burnley has BNP borough councillors and if there's one good thing about them winning a county council seat it's that it makes it a county problem, something that affects all Lancastrians, not just those living in Burnley."

"The vast majority of the British public are opposed to the racist policies of the BNP and it's up to us to inform the rest. It's everybody's problem."

➔ More info: www.hopenothate.org.uk

FBUTUBE
www.youtube.com/fbutube

For more on the campaign

Firefighter unions found alliance

MICK SHAW, FBU PRESIDENT

The FBU has joined with unions representing firefighters in 12 countries to form the International Firefighter Unions Alliance (IFFUA). Agreed at a conference in Vancouver, Canada, March 30–April 1 2009, the new international alliance encompasses unions from Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom in Europe, Israel in the Middle East, Canada, Mexico and the United States in the Americas, as well as Australia and New Zealand. It is hoped that by the next IFFUA conference, in 2012, firefighter unions from all continents of the

world will be participating in the alliance.

The FBU was represented at the conference by General Secretary Matt Wrack, President Mick Shaw and Vice President Alan McLean.

The founding conference agreed an interim constitution that would promote in all countries of the world independent trade unionism and full trade union rights for the firefighting profession; the best levels of remuneration, working conditions and retirement pension provision, the highest standards of firefighting professionalism in order to achieve the highest level of

community safety; the highest standards of safety for firefighters; and would seek to ensure that the firefighting profession and consequently firefighter unions are representative of the communities that they serve, vigorously opposing discrimination on grounds of religion, race, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marital status, disability, age or trade union activity.

The IFFUA will also seek to ensure that the interests of firefighters are represented in international legislative and standard setting bodies and as part of the international labour



movement will work in cooperation with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the Global Unions Council.

The Vancouver conference was the product of three years' discussions between firefighters' unions from the UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA.

It was clear from the conference discussions that firefighters throughout the world face many similar challenges. It was also clear that these challenges were intensifying as a result of the international economic crisis.

Having the ability to learn from each others' experiences and particularly from each others' successes, is of great importance, as is an international trade union voice for the firefighting profession. The alliance should also be in a position to promote and help develop independent trade unionism for firefighters in those countries where there are significant barriers to its development, particularly in the developing world.

General Secretary Matt Wrack has been elected to a steering committee which will oversee the development of the alliance

between now and the next conference in 2012, and draw up proposals for a permanent constitution, the establishment of an office, funding and staffing. ”

➔ Thanks to the International Association of Fire Firefighters (IAFF), representing firefighters in the USA and Canada, for hosting the inaugural conference and firefighters of Vancouver fire station: they cooked the official dinner and served it in the engine room. For more information see the IFFUA website: www.iffua.org

PA PHOTOS



Who runs the

Here today, gone tomorrow

Fire ministers in England just don't last long enough to get to grips with the job. Here's hoping that the latest in the hot seat sticks around

SECRETARY OF STATE (DETR/ODPM/CLG)



GONE

JOHN PRESCOTT

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions then heading the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister.
2001 – May 2006



GONE

RUTH KELLY

Secretary of State, CLG
May 2006 – June 2007



GONE

HAZEL BLEARS

Secretary of State for CLG
June 2007 – June 2009



JOHN DENHAM

Secretary of State for CLG
incumbent

MINISTER OF STATE (DETR/ODPM/CLG)



GONE

NICK RAYNSFORD

Minister for Local & Regional Govt.
June 2001 – May 2005



GONE

PHIL WOOLAS

Minister for Local Government & Communities
May 2005 – June 2007



IS HE...?

JOHN HEALEY

Minister for Local Government & Communities
June 2007 – date



ISSHE...?

ROSIE WINTERTON

????????????????????
????????????????????

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY (FIRE)



GONE

PHIL HOPE

June 2003 – May 2005



GONE

JIM FITZPATRICK

May 2005 – May 2006



GONE

ANGELA E SMITH

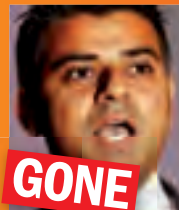
May 2006 – June 2007



GONE

PARMJIT DHANDA

June 2007 – October 2008



GONE

SADIQ KHAN

October 2008 – June 2009



GONE

SARAH MCCARTHY-FRY

9 June 2009 – 11 June 2009



SHAHID MALIK

incumbent

fire service?

Why is it, that no one in government can see FireControl is a doomed and dangerous project? Fire minister after fire minister in England reaches for the same shopworn bits of management jargon to defend it, because no fire minister gets to stay in the job long enough to understand the wretched thing.

We are now on the fifth fire minister in three years – well six if you count Sarah McCarthy Fry who announced mid-June on Twitter that she was going to CLG and taking on the fire brief. Next day, it was announced that Shahid Malik was*. In the event no sooner was McCarthy-Fry in CLG than Kitty Ussher was moved from the Treasury (flipping) and McCarthy Fry moved to the Treasury to replace her.

The fact is England fire ministers don't last long enough to get to grips with the job, so they stick to safe, inconsequential subjects as often as they can. Here's poor Sadiq Khan, in October last year, the first month of his eight month tenure, earning some brownie points with the Bournemouth Daily Echo:

"Newly-appointed fire minister Sadiq Khan has thrown his weight behind the Daily Echo's hard-hitting Fire Alarm campaign ... Mr Khan said: I will definitely be supporting the Daily Echo campaign. It's this sort of innovation that we hope to see around the country.... What the Daily Echo is doing is fantastic."

The next month, forced to defend the FireControl project, which was begun in 2003 and is too complicated to be grasped in his short time in the job, he read out to Parliament the words on the paper in front of him, which were: "FireControl will.... result in greater resilience and collaboration, better information and incident support for firefighters, and a better service to the public."

Last month Mr Khan moved on and the fire brief went to Shahid Malik. How long he will last in the job, no one can tell. Perhaps he will break the mould, but the omens are not good: the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards has decided to hold a second formal inquiry into Mr Malik's expenses claims.

Before Mr Khan, the fire brief was held for a modern record of 16

DEPARTMENTAL SHUFFLING

Remember John Prescott and his junior minister, the nasty Nick Raynsford, the instigators of FireControl and the Bain report - They certainly stayed the course, in the job between 2001 and May 2005. But while they stayed put, there was an unprecedented shuffling of Government departments. Fire had been at the Home Office for more than 40 years before Prescott took over responsibility for the brief in 2001 as secretary of state for newly created department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions. But by May 2002, fire had moved again, this time to a newly established Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. In May 2005 it moved yet again. As for the long-serving Prescott and Raynsford, all that can be said of them is that ignorance would be a very lame excuse.

months by Parmjit Dhanda, fire minister from June 2007 until October 2008. Mr Dhanda's grasp of his brief at the start was so shaky that in his first official speech in the job, he called for more local services and local solutions, apparently unaware that FireControl represents the most centralised and top-down approach ever taken to the fire service. It was also Mr Dhanda's unenviable task to defend government policy at the FBU national conference.

Before Parmjit Dhanda, Angela Smith lasted thirteen months, from May 2006 to June 2007. On its original timetable, FireControl should have been operational by the time she left office. It wasn't, of course, but she did the next best thing: she published a "business case" for it. It would create, she said, a "resilient and integrated system of nationally networked control centres." The business case repeated all the extravagant claims made originally for the scheme, as though nothing had happened in the meantime: the timetable had not slipped, costs had not escalated.

Her predecessor, appointed after Labour's 2005 election victory and lasting for just a year, was the one minister who might have been thought to know exactly what he was at – a firefighter for more than 20 years and

a former FBU executive member, Jim Fitzpatrick, who got the job in May 2005 and lost it in May 2006. Fitzpatrick must be getting used to being shunted from brief to brief without being given time to master any of them: he has just been appointed the fifth farming minister in as many years. In the three years since he gave up being fire minister, he has been in and out of two jobs, first at Trade and Industry (2006 – 2007) then at Transport (2007 – 2009.)

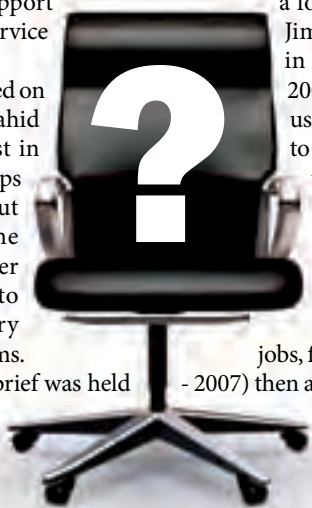
If five fire ministers in

three years is not bad enough, two other junior ministers and under secretaries have had bits of the responsibility from time to time, answering parliamentary questions on fire: Phil Woolas and Phil Hope. And John Denham has just become the third secretary of state for communities and local government – the fire minister's boss – in as many years. Ruth Kelly did the job from May 2006 to June 2007. Then Hazel Blears took over, and departed in June this year on the eve of the local government elections wearing a badge saying "Rocking the boat."

But how good, it would be if John Denham – a minister with a reputation for independence of thought – and Shahid Malik had time to get to grips with their brief. And rethink the albatross they have inherited.

DEVOLUTION RULES OK (well better than Westminster)

Compared to Westminster, the devolved governments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have had rather more continuity in the running of the fire service. In Cardiff, where responsibility lies with the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government, Brian Gibbons has been in post for nearly two years. For a brief period of seven weeks following the May 2007 Wales Assembly elections there was some uncertainty, but before that Edwina Hart was in the job for four years. In Scotland, Fergus Ewing has been in the newly created post of Minister for Community Safety since May 2007. And while his immediate predecessor Johann Lamont, was the responsible minister - Deputy Minister for Justice - for just six months, prior to her Hugh Henry held the post for four years, between November 2002 and November 2006. And in Belfast as Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Michael McGimpsey has been responsible for fire since May 2007.



Why I'm going to the lobby and rally...

The Union is organising a rally and lobby of the Westminster Parliament for 21 October. It will be highlighting the dangers and our total opposition to the regional controls project as well as the wider threats to FBU members' jobs, pay and conditions. Firefighter spoke to some of the FBU members who intend to go.



JOHN DENVIR

**GROUP COMMANDER
NORTHERN IRELAND FRs
ONC REP FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

"The threat of closing individual control rooms is already having a detrimental effect on the fire service.

We need to challenge those fire authorities who are using integrated risk management planning to dilute the quality of service we are providing. We also need to challenge those Chief Fire Officers and Fire Authority chiefs who say their greatest asset is their people.



If that were to be true they would be fighting to keep them. I've been in the service for nearly 25 years.

Firefighters need to know they have experienced competent back up in the control

room. If any member of my family needed to contact control I would want to know they were dealing with professionals."

SHARON THORNDYKE

CONTROL REP, EAST ANGLIA

"The lobby and rally on October 21 is a chance to raise, yet again, with our politicians the concerns of control staff about the effect regional controls would have on the safety of both the public and firefighters.

The East of England is among the last of the regional fire controls to be going live, with a cut over date as late as February 2012 for Hertfordshire and Norfolk. But we now believe this could be delayed by a further 10 months due to technology issues.

Early indications are that up to 90 control staff are facing either redeployment or redundancy in this region. LACC directors

need to be aware that it is the knowledge and expertise of the staff operating the mobilising system that will make it work and losing them will impact on call taking and crew safety. Complicated jump crewing arrangements for special appliances will only delay mobilising and increase the health and safety implications for firefighters."



SAM RYE

**FIREFIGHTER,
COUNTY DURHAM
WOMEN'S REP,
NORTH EAST**



"I'll be down to the lobby and rally to speak against cuts in the fire service and lobby my MP, William Hague. Cuts made in this recession risk endangering both the public and frontline firefighters. Regional controls, if they go ahead, will have a huge effect on the way we operate as firefighters. I don't have any confidence in what's being proposed. The project is already massively overspent, no one wants it and it just seems the government is hell bent on going ahead regardless. We could be losing a lot of good experienced control staff. And having huge regional controls would make it easier for terrorists to wipe out a whole region with one hit."

PETE PRESTON

SECRETARY, NATIONAL RETAINED COMMITTEE

"We don't believe regional control centres will in any way deliver a better service to the public or frontline firefighters. Retained members are particularly incensed because if just a small fraction of the money spent on regional controls was diverted to retained, it could make real improvements to retained crews – boosting recruitment, retained fees and the amount of training time available. It could have been used to fund a national advertising and recruitment campaign to encourage entry into the retained service, particularly in areas experiencing difficulties maintaining their crews."



GRAEME DICKSON

**EMERGENCY FIRE CONTROL OPERATOR
HUMBERSIDE**

"I find it quite staggering that the government are looking to save millions of pounds by attacking our shift system when they are wasting over £1 billion of the public's money on the regional control project, which was originally trumpeted as saving millions of pounds a year. Costs have now rocketed and in my own region the regional control will cost more than £1 million per year to run than the four existing control rooms cost now, and do less work. Rather than promoting resilience the regional control project is having the opposite effect on brigades, with well trained, experienced and highly motivated control staff becoming disillusioned because of the uncertainty over their futures and now seeking employment opportunities elsewhere. It really is a tragedy, not just the waste of public money, but also the effect on control staff who have served their communities so well over the years. The sooner politicians and the public wake up to this fact the better."



SANDRA WILLIAMS

BRIGADE CHAIR, NORTH WALES

"One of the concerns we will be raising is co-responding, planned for next year in our region. The fire service has a wide remit already without having to train people to fill those gaps the ambulance service can't fill. Firefighters are experts. The danger is this risks being diluted if co-responding comes in and emergency services are bundled together. I will also be going to the lobby and rally to support our colleagues in England, opposing regional controls. Personally, I spent 20 years in control, and can see that they are not going to work."



ALEX MILLER

BRIGADE SECRETARY, STRATHCLYDE

"The budget for FireControl is already out of control yet we face savage cuts in frontline services next year."

The effect of the government's proposals, primarily on our colleagues in control centres throughout England, will not only endanger their jobs and conditions of service but will lead, I believe, to a poorer service to the public.

Firefighters nationally, including here in Scotland, cannot afford to be complacent. We should be united to fight and oppose any proposed attacks on our conditions and should endeavour to be in Westminster in October. We must lobby politicians on not only the dangers of regional controls but the impact of cuts on firefighters safety and the public in general.

Always remember it is we who see first hand the suffering that occurs at incidents and it is we who must convince the politicians that any proposals for cuts and regional controls are folly."



JOE MACVEIGH

REGIONAL SECRETARY, LONDON

"FBU members are going to lobby parliament because we are sick of being ignored by employers and government."

A billion or more of taxpayers money is being ploughed into

FireControl, a project whose functional capacity has yet to be proven. Hundreds of experienced and professional control staff will be on the employment

scrapheap due to this ill thought out and ludicrous plan. They deserve better.

What's needed is proper investment in frontline services and employers and government willing to listen to firefighters and control staff represented by the FBU."



The Department for Communities and Local Government is considering a further 10-month delay to FireControl. The national network may not now be ready for the 2012 Olympics when it is meant to be at the forefront of any response to a major incident such as a terrorist attack



Losing the Olym

News that the national network of regional controls project may now not be ready for the Olympics was broken in *The Observer* newspaper. Fire service control staff in a number of regions across England started to be briefed about the news in mid-June although no public announcement has been made.

The controversial £1.4 billion project to shut down 46 existing emergency control rooms and replace them with nine regional fire control centres was meant to be finished by 2007.

A series of delays followed by major technical problems has seen the completion date pushed back. 2012 Olympic host city London may not have its new control in time for the games, leaving it isolated and out of the network while the games are taking place.

These fresh delays – which the Union predicted last year – would push up already spiralling costs even further. The delays will leave the Government paying another £15 million in rents to keep the new

regional control centres empty for longer. But there will be more to pay for the army of consultants, civil servants and project managers needed to try and deliver the project pushing the costs of the delay, the union estimates, above £30 million.

MORE DELAYS, MORE COSTS

Increased costs of a 10-month delay

RCC	COST
The South West	£1,548,930
East Midlands	£1,540,380
North East	£1,489,390
West Midlands	£1,678,240
South East	£1,736,680
North West	£1,554,030
Yorkshire & Humberside	£1,526,220
East Of England	£1,660,640

Estimates based on parliamentary answers, 31 March 2009 [267875] and 28 April 2009 [271665]

An initial six month “rent holiday” was set aside to cover the period between the buildings being completed, a fit out programme and the first fire brigades moving in.

Further delays would mean none of the new buildings will become operational until 2011.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: “The project is in meltdown and may not be properly tested and in place for the 2012 Olympics, even if they can make it work. Fire services needed the entire national network to be bedded down and tested by summer 2011 and that will not happen.

“The options being looked at are farcical. They appear to be the last gasp of civil servants desperate to justify their previous recommendations.

“The new ministers need to take the opportunity to look at this project afresh and end it now to give the fire service certainty and end the anxiety being caused to control room staff.



pic race?

CONFERENCE REITERATES TOTAL OPPOSITION TO FIRECONTROL

FBU Annual Conference in May reiterated “total opposition” to FireControl and again called on government to scrap the “unnecessary and wasteful” project.

But should the Westminster government force through the project the Union would continue to seek guarantees of no compulsory redundancy for any FBU member, “to be achieved primarily through continued employment performing appropriate duties within their role or redeployment, supplemented by the use of voluntary severance or early retirement if this is necessary.”

It would also demand NJC Grey Book conditions as a minimum and FBU recognition for all staff required to work in the proposed Regional Control Centres.

Conference noted that the Union’s efforts to secure these conditions had not seen fire and rescue authorities, national employers on the NJC and the LACCs “engage effectively in discussions to address the concerns of their employees” and delegates agreed that if both of those objectives cannot be achieved in relation to any LACC, the Union would call on affected Fire and Rescue Authorities not to transfer members’ employment to the LACC because of the impact on jobs, terms and conditions and the recognition of the FBU.

The Union would also demand of LACCs not to carry out any compulsory redundancies and to recognise the FBU and Grey Book conditions for new and existing staff (unless changes agreed by FBU). Should any LACC fail to deliver each of the above demands, a separate demand will be made of each Fire and Rescue Authority in the region to be covered by that LACC that it will refuse to transfer staff to the new employer.

Should the FRS refuse to do give such a commitment by the date indicated by the FBU then the Union would start a ballot for strike action, Conference agreed.



**The only real option
is keeping and
upgrading our
existing fire controls**

“The only real option is keeping and upgrading our existing fire controls and getting the new digital radio system in place.

“We were told first of all this would be finished by the end of 2007, so many fire authorities put off upgrading their own systems. If the Government had not intervened with this plan all fire services would have had their own newer systems in place long before the Olympics.

“The project is already years late, massively over-budget and Government remain unable

to convince the fire service they can make it work properly. To continue with these plans in this state is entirely irresponsible.”

“This is a scandalous waste of public money and more delays will make it worse. This is at a time when fire brigades are looking at major cuts because of a lack of cash.

“The buildings were completed on time but rental payments were delayed to give Government time to fit out the interiors and install the IT. But a host of other delays have put the project years behind schedule and left the buildings non-operational.

“The fault lies at the door of Government. No local fire authority is responsible in anyway for anything which has happened up to now.

“Taxpayers are propping up another failing IT project because the Government is too embarrassed to admit how bad things have become. If they want to save money they should shut this Project down before it gets worse.”

WHAT'S MY ROLE?

STEFANO CAGNONI

Jenny Morris Operational policy advisor for UK FRS, Health and Safety Executive



I started my career as one of HM Inspectors of health and safety in the construction sector, then moved

to a public services group covering schools, hospitals and the fire and rescue service – which included the FRS in Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. This gave me valuable experience of how health and safety is applied in operational firefighting.

In May of this year, I changed roles from an operational inspector dealing with local issues to HSE's national FRS lead. I aim to build on the work of my predecessors by working with the Service to continue to enhance the safety culture in the Service and also to help identify new areas of work to support this.

The HSE is in the midst of carrying out targeted health and safety management inspections at eight FRSs in Great Britain. Inspectors will be sampling how health and safety is being managed by considering a suite of operational topics within each of the FRSs: the maintenance of core operational skills, how risk critical information is provided, competence for incident command and how breathing apparatus and compartment fire behaviour training is delivered. Inspectors will be interested in whether each FRS is following its own policies and procedures in these areas.

Eight different FRSs have been selected – six in England, one in Scotland and one in Wales – representing a spread of size and location from predominantly urban to mainly rural FRSs. The eight FRS included



KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- ♦ Engaging with fire service stakeholders on health and safety related issues
- ♦ Providing guidance and support for HSE operational colleagues on fire and rescue service health and safety issues
- ♦ Managing the input to guidance that goes on the HSE website and in publications
- ♦ Working on special health and safety related projects – including the planned inspection programme described here

are Hampshire, Norfolk, Durham and Darlington, Grampian, Cornwall, Greater Manchester Conurbation, North Wales and Oxfordshire. The inspections are conducted by a small team of inspectors from a national team of 20 briefed and trained inspectors and each inspection will usually take two or three days.

Inspectors will be looking to see if there are gaps between FRSs' written procedures and the way those procedures are being applied on operations by talking to staff to seek their experiences. (Inspectors will not be attending incidents).

For instance, management will have a procedure for wearing breathing apparatus. But are they monitoring the procedure to make sure it's being implemented? If the people on the ground are doing something different from the policy, is that because they have been able to deviate on a local level because nobody is checking what they've been doing, or because the procedure itself can't be followed?

These questions need to be asked and answered to gather evidence to identify what is needed to improve procedures and minimise accidents.

The data the eight inspections yield could help point a way forward to improve procedures and management systems so that staff are not exposed to unnecessary risk while carrying out their duties. Firefighters should not be exposed to unnecessary risk; they can be if gaps between policy and practice are not brought to light, thus preventing them from being closed.

Each FRS inspected will receive a detailed report of the team's findings. When all are completed, I will produce an anonymous national report so that other FRSs and sector stakeholders can benefit from the information and intelligence gathered. There will be no "naming and shaming" in this document.

The HSE has decided to carry out this planned inspection programme primarily because there has been little or no nationally organised proactive HSE inspections of the FRS for a number of years, although some inspectors have been engaging locally.

Over the past few years there has been a number of multiple fatalities during operational incidents, and the number of fatal accidents appears to be higher than over the preceding period, though it is the HSE's view that the numbers are too small for any statistical significance to be drawn from the figures.

Some within the FRS have raised concerns with HSE that a number of issues are contributing to a lower level of competence of frontline staff, particularly front line supervision. This is all set in the context of the continuing debate over the way FRS balances operational requirements with health and safety responsibilities. Hence HSE has decided to focus on certain operational topics during their inspections.

The HSE wants to work with the service to reduce all accidents – fatal and non-fatal. Injury and ill-health rates for the Fire and Rescue Service are above average and there remains scope for improvement through better management of health and safety as part of good management practice.

It is also important to make sure staff are properly trained to minimise the risk of slips, trips, falls and manual handling incidents which remain the main cause of injury.

Evidence collated from the inspections should help FRS identify areas of notable practice but also any weaknesses in management systems that expose staff to unnecessary risk. They should also help the HSE identify what further work needs to be done to enhance the safety of frontline staff.



ADRIAN CLARKE

Regional Secretary
East Anglia

Essex fire authority is set to implement a rolling programme of frontline cuts, which will see fewer firefighters spread more thinly across the country, leaving too few firefighters on duty to crew all the appliances. The brigade proposes to cut the number of firefighters by "managed vacancies" from 954 firefighters in December 2008, to an average of 940 during 2008/9, to 920 during 2009/10, to 905 in March 2010.

Forty four of those jobs – one in ten of the frontline fire station based crews – would go by changing the way aerial ladder platforms and rescue tenders are crewed. The impact would be there would not be enough firefighters to crew all appliances, even for emergency response.

A move to deliver genuine efficiency savings would not involve targeting frontline fire crews for cuts. The union instead has called for a joint review of the balance between office-based activities and the 999 emergency response with a view to redeploying resources to fire stations. It says there also needs to be a better balance between prevention activities and the need for a proper and safe emergency response.

It has also pointed out that Essex Fire Authority could make real savings and maintain frontline services if it took a closer look at how money was spent. The union highlighted one example where the fire authority paid £252,000 over 14 months to 'contracting agents' to cover for a member of staff who had left (Freedom of Information answer).

We have also objected to a number of other changes which it says local managers are trying to impose rather than negotiate. The frontline service must not be compromised by the drive to make savings. Firefighters can't crew two fire engines at the same time and we can't respond to two 999 emergencies at the same time.

The fire authority is forcing these plans through without honest consultation with frontline fire crews and officers and without agreement. That is a recipe for a ballot for industrial action.

As *Firefighter* went to press, the Union had given the fire authority until 25 June to shelve plans to cut firefighters or they will ballot for industrial action.

Best foot forward

Hot-foot it to the top of the nation's to-do list

WALKING

Last year, the ranks of the Ramblers younger members swelled by an unprecedented 15 per cent, as new walkers took to their feet to explore the fun, free – and fat-burning – pastime, in some of the country's loveliest city streets and countryside. Whether they were walking alone or with one of the Ramblers groups, they were undoubtedly drawn by the enormous physical – and just as much mental – benefits that this ever-changing form of exercise offers.

The physical benefits of walking stem both from the serious nuts-and-bolts quality of cardiovascular workout it can provide and from simple fact that it can be so easily incorporated into an everyday routine.

It is this flexibility, combined with 'serious exercise' status, which makes walking such a healthy pastime. If 'prescribed' to the whole population, regular walking – 30 brisk minutes a day, five times a week – would: cut obesity, reduce deaths from coronary heart disease by over a third, cut by two thirds the risks of strokes in middle-aged men, halve rates of colon cancer, cut by a quarter risks of dying of a heart attack by those who have already survived one, reduce cases of osteoarthritis, help older people to gain strength and

BOX: WALKING KIT:

- ◆ Trail mix (nuts, seeds and dried fruits)
- ◆ Swiss army knife – great for picking stones out of shoes
- ◆ Poles – for balancing on rocky terrain
- ◆ Waterproof jacket and trousers
- ◆ Compass and map
- ◆ Rucksack
- ◆ Water
- ◆ A good pair of boots with thick soles and ankle support
- ◆ Plasters!

balance to reduce bone fractures, dramatically cut diabetes and cardiovascular disease and reduce levels of breast and colon cancer.

Where walking really has the upper hand over other forms of exercise, however, is the wealth of 'unseen' mental and social benefits it provides.

Not only does a walk in the all-essential daylight lift your mood, increase your serotonin levels and replenish your vitamin E stocks (a must in winter), but it could improve your social life too; qualitative research with first-time walkers (Ramblers/MORI 2005) suggests that people who walk together (in this case parents and children) chat more and relate to each other better! Research aside, the droves of young and

older couples who have found love through Ramblers groups speak for themselves.

Walking is incredibly flexible and can provide all the workout you need with a little variation in pace and terrain – walk up and down hills and you can tone and build muscle in the legs and glutes (calves particularly benefit). Add poles, and you've got an upper body workout. Walk swiftly on challenging ground (mountains, for example), and the fat burning qualities of walking more than rival a flat jog.

Lastly, you can throw away your headphones, gym TVs and motivational books, because walking in beautiful country or cityscapes is completely absorbing – so much so, you will forget you are working so hard.

→ The Ramblers is the charity at the heart of walking in Britain. We work to make it easy for everyone to walk, whether in countryside, cities, hills, the coast, and on or off the beaten track. We are experts on all things walking and for 75 years we have helped to build and protect Britain's 150,000-mile path network. We run over 28,000 group walks a year and we campaign for better walking routes and more walking opportunities. Visit www.ramblers.org.uk. To find walks being held by your nearest Ramblers group visit www.ramblers.org.uk/areas_groups/areas_and_groups, OR for groups for people in their 20s, 30s and 40s visit www.ramblers.co.uk/groups/20s-30s



Walking in the Lake District: The pastime has a wealth of 'unseen' mental and social benefits

PA IMAGES

Theft at work

Q I've had personal belongings stolen at work. Is my employer responsible and can I claim compensation from them for the loss?

A It's worth looking into but, unless personal property is specifically covered in your contract, a colleague stole your property or your employer is clearly negligent, then it is unlikely that you will get them to pay out.

An employer is liable for unlawful acts carried out by an employee in the course of their employment.

So, damage to an employee's car by careless driving of a works vehicle by another employee, for example, would be covered.

Malicious damage or theft would probably be regarded as outside the scope of someone's employment (and therefore the employer would not be responsible), unless it was by an employee specifically entrusted with employees' personal possessions, such as a car park attendant or security guard.

If the theft was carried out by visitors or intruders then your contract of employment may deal with it, though this would be unusual. If it does then the employer will be in breach of that contract if they fail to pay what the contract says they should pay.

You can sue in the county court, as long as you do so within six years of the employer's refusal or failure to pay.

But even if the crime was committed by a trespasser, such as a burglar, the law is not likely to hold the employer to blame if it was not possible, at reasonable expense, to keep the intruder out (the situation might be different if a thief or vandal got into a secure compound).

Redundancy

Q I am a retained firefighter and I have been made



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

Legal Beagle

Answers to some frequently asked legal questions that members put to the FBU

redundant from my job outside the fire service. I was not consulted by my employer about the redundancy. Is this against the law?

A An employer planning to make collective redundancies (20 or more) is obliged to consult the employees' representatives at least 30 or 90 days before the redundancy notices take place – 30 days when the number of redundancies is between 20 and 99, 90 when it is 100 or more.

Redundancy notices can be issued only when the consultation is completed.

Your union can go to an Employment Tribunal if the

employer fails to consult. A tribunal has the power to make a "protective award" which requires the employer to pay the employees each a week's pay for the period in which it failed to consult, to a limit of 90 days.

Compromise agreement

Q I have been asked to sign a compromise agreement. What is a compromise agreement?

A A compromise agreement is a legally binding agreement usually between an employee and employer when the parties want to set out the terms and

conditions reached when a contract of employment is to be terminated or a dispute is to be resolved (when the employment contract is not being terminated).

There are a number of different circumstances when a compromise agreement can be used, such as redundancy, dismissal or to settle an Employment Tribunal claim.

The purpose is to provide certainty for both parties and it is very important to understand what you are agreeing to before signing it.

It is a good idea to try to get a reference incorporated into the agreement and this should be done early on in negotiations.

It is a requirement of a compromise agreement that you receive independent legal advice from someone professionally qualified, usually a solicitor or a trade union official. So speak to your union rep.

By signing a compromise agreement you specifically exclude your right to take a legal claim against your employer, unless the employer breaches the agreement by, for example, not paying you the money agreed. Some compromise agreements also prevent you claiming for work-related injuries and illness that you were aware of at the time of signing it.

Confidentiality clauses are usually standard in compromise agreements. This means that you cannot usually tell people about the terms of the agreement. Some employers insist that a compromise agreement prevents you from telling others that you have even signed a compromise agreement.

The legal advice you receive before signing the agreement will explain what you can and cannot say and to whom.

→ The advice published here is not intended as legal advice on individual cases. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.

‘Being out on the water and part of a team is great fun’

Diane Critchlow loves nothing better than getting out on the sea with her crew in a Cornish pilot gig, a traditional wooden six-oared rowing boat

Gym workouts don't hold much attraction for Weymouth fire-fighter Diane Critchlow – she has always preferred keeping fit in the fresh air. And there is certainly plenty of fresh air to be had rowing out at sea in a traditional wooden six-oared rowing boat.

The boat is a Cornish pilot gig, a working boat that was once used to take pilots out to incoming vessels from the Atlantic. The gigs are now crewed solely for pleasure – a pleasure that includes competitive racing at regattas dotted along the South West coast from Cornwall to Dorset.

The sport has spawned clubs as far away as the US, the Faroe Islands and Holland. World championships are held each May in the Isles of Scilly. Diane took up the sport at Weymouth Rowing Club four years ago.

But it is only this year, when she started a two-year secondment from firefighting to the community task team, that she began to race competitively. Working days not shifts meant she could commit to a packed timetable of training and race fixtures. Crews train four times a week and there are regattas each week in the peak season. Diane expects to return to operational duties but is making the most of her chance to race for the next two years.

She discovered the delights of Cornish pilot gig racing when looking around for

new ways to keep fit. “I wondered what I could do to build my strength up,” says Diane, who joined red watch seven years ago. “Being out there on the water and part of a team is great fun and really good exercise. It's all about stamina, timing and group strength.”

‘Double shift’ racing

Now that she represents the club in races, she sometimes ends up doing a “double shift”, racing twice in the same contest – once in the women's “A” team and then in the “vets” team for women over 40. For instance, at a recent event at Appledore in Devon, the Weymouth women's “A” team came third and the women's “vets” team fourth in different races. Diane was in both. She also rowed for both “vets” and “A” team at the world championships this year.

Each race takes about 20 minutes and provides a very rigorous upper body workout as crews pit their skills against rival gigs. Diane, FBU women's rep for the South West, says she has always loved “the adrenalin rush” of competitive sport and proved herself an elite sportswoman earlier in her life.

Twenty-six years ago she had two very impressive wins in a middle distance track event. 1984 she became the Amateur Athletics Association women's national



PICTURES: ROBIN JONES / THE DIGITAL SOUTH





DIANE CRITCHLOW

A Weymouth firefighter and FBU women's rep for the South West, Diane has always loved "the adrenalin rush" of competitive sport, and proved herself an elite sportswoman earlier in her life. Today she is passionate about rowing, in a Cornish pilot gig, and competes at regattas from Cornwall to Dorset.



champion for the 1500 metres after winning the race at Crystal Palace. And the record she set for the same distance in the same year in the Dorset county championships – stood unbeaten for 20 years. Diane's personal best time for the distance was 4 minutes 24 seconds – which is in the top 30 in the UK ranking for her age at the time, the category for 15 year-olds. She then ran for England for the next three years. She also ran regularly in 800 metres and crosscountry events, racing "all over the place" in her mid to late teens.

Then came the commitments of motherhood, running a home and full-time work – her children are now teenagers – and, a few years ago, a determination to look for new challenges to build up her strength and fitness. Rowing in a Cornish pilot gig seemed to fit the bill – and she didn't have to travel far to find a club.

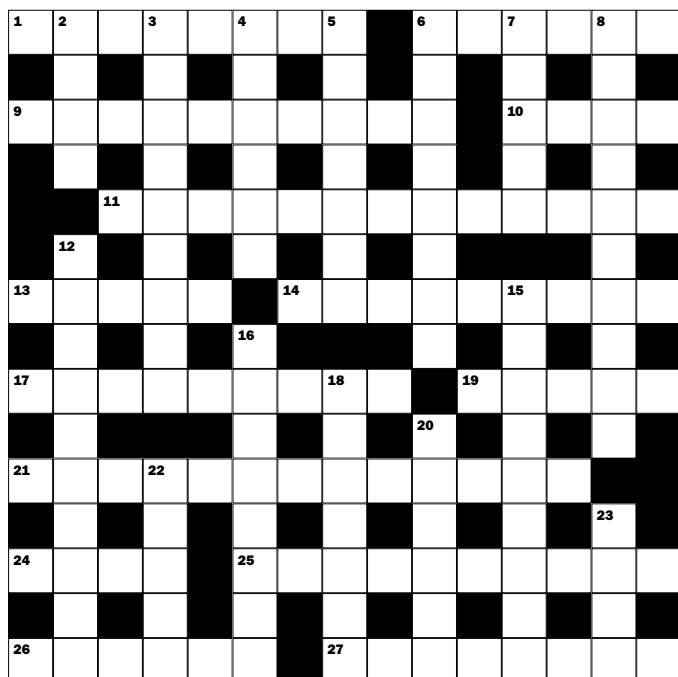
'We row all year round'

The crew in Diane's gig is made up of six women rowers – three on the stroke side, three on the bow side – and a cox. Diane generally rows at number two on the stroke side. She also enjoys wakeboarding, which combines waterskiing, snowboarding and surfing techniques, making the most of living by the sea. But her main sporting focus is now rowing – and not just in the summer. "We row all year round. But in the winter as it gets dark so early, we can only row at weekends.

Diane and her fellow crew members – five more women and a female cox – train mostly in the sea. In the Scilly Isles Diane and fellow crew members go out in really big seas. Being out in the fresh air, whether it's sunny or blustery, rowing with colleagues, bonding and building up strength. There is, says Diane, nothing quite like it. And it certainly beats running on a treadmill.

➔ More info: www.ara-rowing.org/

Quick Crossword



ACROSS

- 1 Highly potent anise spirit once widely banned (8)
6, 20 Momentous struggle of 1984 (6, 6)
9 Firefighter's feline gossip-gatherer (10)
10 Long-handled floor-cleaning implements (4)
11 Practice of taking matters to the limit (13)
13 Packaged in rigid container; sparred (5)
14 (Business) partner; mentally connect; join or combine (9)
17 Watch or clock (9)
19 Farm buildings (5)
21 You're in this when you've been arrested! (6,7)
24 Essential bit of kit – not to be confused with stockings (4)
25 Mainly white-feathered seabird found in, er, tropical parts (10)
26 Bivalve mollusc often eaten alive (6)
27 Framework of bones in animals (8)

DOWN

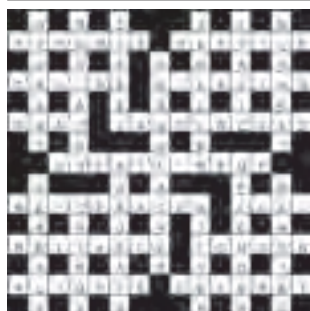
- 2** Rainwater tank; wine container; archery target; bum (4)
3 Stick one's nose in (9)
4 Pointy things on shrub or tree (6)
5 Forgives, lets off, exempts (7)
6 Volatile, inflammable, toxic liquid originally distilled from wood (8)
7 Deadens (5)
8 Replacing mortar between bricks (10)
12 Study of poisons (10)
15 Not discernable to the ear (9)
16 Board member; filmmaker (8)
18 Voucher exchanged for rations, goods, services or discount (7)
20 See 6 across (6)
22 Unable to move; without active chemical (5)
23 Group of three (4)

Solution to June 2009 crossword

Winner of the May Firefighter 2009 quiz
 Barry Newstead of Ashford

Answers to June 2009 quiz

1. b – Knights of the Round Table
 2. c – 1959
 3. c – Catherine Parr
 4. b – Spencer Perceval
 5. b – Pudding Lane



WIN!
 Tickets to the Ashes

Prize

Win tickets to the Ashes with this month's sport-themed quiz



1. Who was the only driver to beat Jenson Button in the first seven races of this season's Formula 1 (up to and including the Turkish grand prix)?

- a. Lewis Hamilton
 b. Rubens Barrichello
 c. Sebastian Vettel
 d. Felipe Massa

2. Who won the 2009 FA CUP?

- a. Arsenal
 b. Manchester United
 c. Everton
 d. Chelsea

3. Which cricket outsiders beat England in the first match of the 2009 Twenty 20 World Cup?

- a. Netherlands

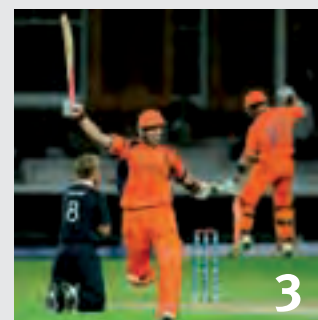
- b. Ireland
 c. Scotland
 d. Bangladesh

4. How much did AC Milan pay for Kaka?

- a. 8.5 million euros
 b. 56 million euros
 c. 18 million euros
 d. 27 million euros

5. Name the fighter who knocked Ricky Hatton out in the second round of a much publicised fight in Las Vegas in May.

- a. Floyd Mayweather Jnr
 b. Oscar de la Hoya
 c. Manny Pacquiao
 d. Vladimir Klitschko



HOW TO ENTER

To win a pair of tickets to the third test of the Ashes series at Edgbaston, Birmingham, on 1 August 09 please send your answers to the Prize Quiz by 21 July 2009 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (July 2009) FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.

StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear

Panic stations



Panic in the upper reaches of the fire service. Government is making clear it wants the top managers (that's the chiefs and other members of the strategic management teams) to reveal what they are being paid.

All of it. Not just the 'basic' pay, but salary, bonuses, additional payments, compensation, ex gratia payments, benefits in kind and pension entitlement. What a helpful list for Freedom of Information requests.

In McGuirkside they are particularly concerned and have written off their response to the Government's consultation. While supporting openness and transparency, they don't want those principles to apply to them.

Of course, lest I be accused of bias, McGuirkside may have been in the vanguard of giving big pay rises to the top officers and managers. But **plenty of other fire authorities have quietly followed suit and have even resisted Freedom of Information Act requests to divulge what's been going on.**

They have been happy to top up the pay of their own senior managers in various ways while letting Tony McGuirk and Merseyside get the headlines and the pain



Tony McGuirk will soon be celebrating his 50th birthday

which comes with them. I'm sure that point will not be lost on Tony McGuirk.

The Government is on to the bonus culture – local 'pay top ups' have been paid in the upper reaches of the fire service. When you see the pay rises and other benefits in kind involved, when they are released, you will understand.

My interest is drawn to the pension benefits which seem a particular concern in McGuirkside. Executive Director of Resources, Kieran Timmins responded on behalf of the fire authority to the Government plans.

His response stated: "It is undoubted that the figures for pension entitlement will be large. Large 'headline grabbing' figures for individuals resulting from benefits earned over 30 years of work may distract."

What 'headline grabbing figures' could there be? I look to my calendar to see which 50th birthdays are coming up in Merseyside. Imagine my surprise when **I see we are rapidly approaching the 50th birthday of one Tony McGuirk**, a date when he can, in theory, take retirement from the fire service.

Parmjit tries to cling on



The citizens of Gloucester were left biting their finger nails to see if ex-fire minister Parmjit Dhanda MP could cling on to his seat by being elected Speaker of the House of Commons. If he won the position, the usual rule is that other political parties would not run against him in the General Election, handing the seat to him.

It was a really close run thing to see if Parmjit ended bottom in the voting. And his opponents for his Gloucester seat did appear very relaxed.

Tory hopeful Richard Graham told the local paper: "Mr Dhanda is an ambitious young man, his career has run out of steam in the Government and he is looking for other things. The only issue I have seen him lead on was the regionalisation of the fire control centre, and that was hardly an unmitigated success. I have to say, his qualifications look modest."

Jeremy Hilton, the leader of the Liberal Democrats on both Gloucester City and Gloucestershire County Councils, was even more brutal: "It sounds to me like Mr Dhanda is trying to secure himself a job which would save his neck ... We will have to wait and see what happens now."

And what was the verdict of his fellow MPs? It wasn't even close.

Bottom of the poll, by more than a mile. The citizens of Gloucester can sleep safe in their beds knowing the can dump Mr Dhanda at the General Election after all.

Jumping the boat she rocked



And so farewell then Hazel Blears, former Secretary of State, who jumped out of the boat she was

rocking before she was thrown overboard. She is clinging on to her seat after generously writing out a cheque for £13,000 to the taxpayer whilst repeating that she had done nothing wrong.

And she had seemed so invincible only weeks before. In one of her final contributions **she had thundered at the FBU that the FireControl Project was in the "top 20" Government priorities** and will be driven through.

She soon hit choppy waters when the Daily Torygraph got on her tail about capital gains tax and 'flipping' her main home to ensure her affairs were as 'tax efficient' as possible.

The rot set in at the Fire Conference when she was a no show and then fire minister Sadiq Khan gave her speech for her.

Is FireControl a top 20 Government priority still? The political cats think not: it comes well down the list after saving seat, saving job, saving expense account, keeping out of the newspapers, finding moral compass, saving neck, not being caught out with inflated council tax claims and so on.

Bang go IRMPs



FireControl might be joining Hazel in the drink. It is currently in intensive care.

By the time you read this you might have heard of the next set of delays. CLG is also looking at rejigging which regions are going in which tranche – some being put back, others brought forward.

What the army of advisers and consultants have not worked out is that the 'technical' problems which have arisen are the same in every region.

CLG is also trying to organise a regional 'race to the bottom' on predetermined attendances.

Instead of each fire service being able to decide what the PDA is in their brigade based on their IRMP, it's easier for the new control system for this to be region wide.

Bang goes IRMP and the Fire and Rescue Act along with one giant step towards regional fire services.

✂ if you have any snippets you think Station Cat should get his sharp claws into email: stationcat@fbu.org.uk

25-year badges



Wendy Barnwell (l), West Midlands Fire Control receives her 25-year badge from Brigade Secretary Rose Jones



Steven Wyn (l), Bangor Fire Station, receives his 25-year badge from North Wales Membership Secretary Arwel Roberts



Neil Avery (r), Wolverhampton Fire Safety Centre, receives his 25-year badge from Regional Secretary Chris Downes



Steve Garrington (l) Washington, Tyne and Wear, receives his 25-year badge from Branch Secretary Steve Smiles



Colin Adamson (l) Washington, Tyne and Wear, receives his 25-year badge from Branch Secretary Steve Smiles



Thom Stitt (l), Blue Watch Control, Northants, receives his 25-year badge from Region 6 Chair Tom Murray



Chris Hunt (l), White Watch, Moulton, Northants, receives his 25-year badge from Region 6 Chair Tom Murray



Garry Warren (l) receives his 25-year badge from East Ham, London, Branch Secretary Dave Thomas



Chris Ruston (l), receives his 25-year badge from West Midlands Brigade Secretary Rose Jones

Please send photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk Please include FULL DETAILS for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.



Linda Melland (l) and **Jane Farenden (r)**, West Midlands Fire Control, receive their 25-year badges from Brigade Secretary Rose Jones

FBU REGIONAL OFFICES

→ **Region 1 Scotland**
52 St Enoch Square, Glasgow,
Scotland G1 4AA
0141 221 2309
01rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 2 N. Ireland**
14 Bachelors Walk, Lisburn,
Co Antrim, BT28 1XJ
02892 664622
02rs@fbu.org

→ **Region 3 Cleveland, Durham, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear**
1 Carlton Court, 5th Avenue, Team Valley,
Gateshead, NE11 0AZ
0191 487 4142
03rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 4 Yorkshire and Humberside**
9 Marsh Street, Rothwell,
Leeds, LS26 0AG
0113 288 7000
04rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 5 Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Isle of Man, Cumbria, Merseyside, Cheshire**
The Lighthouse, Lower Mersey St,
Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 2AL
0151 357 4400
05rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 6 Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire**
Little Dennis Street South (above Dawsons)
Nottingham NG2 4EU
0115 947 2042
06gen@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 7 West Midlands, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester, Salop**
195/17 Halesowen Rd, Old Hill,
West Midlands, B64 6HE
01384 413633
07rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 8 Mid and West Wales, North Wales, South Wales**
4 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed,
Bridgend, CF35 5UJ
01656 867910
08rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 9 Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk**
28 Atlantic Square, Station Road,
Witham, Essex, CM8 2TL
01376 521521
09rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 10 London**
John Horner Mews, Frome Street,
Islington, London, N1 8PB
020 7359 3638
london@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 11 Kent, Surrey, Sussex**
Units A&B, Ground Floor,
219B Preston Road, Brighton BN1 6SA
01474 320473
11rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 12 Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Isle of Wight**
FBU Regional Office, The Merlin Centre,
Unit L, Gatehouse Close, Aylesbury HP19 8DP
01494 513034
12rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 13 Cornwall, Devon and Somerset, Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Dorset**
158 Muller Road, Horfield,
Bristol, BS7 9RE
0117 935 5132
13rs@fbu.org.uk

Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.**

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

T THOMPSONS SOLICITORS